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ABSTRACT

A teacher training project, based on a multidisciplinary team approach, provides a model for introducing primary level special education to developing countries. One group of 20 university graduates are intensively trained to become teacher trainers, while plans exist for a second group of 20 primary school teachers to be trained to assist children lacking basic readiness skills. The goal of the project is to demonstrate methods to lower the high attrition rate in the primary schools of developing nations. (Author/SBH)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING NATIONS
A PROPOSAL FOR TEACHER TRAINING IN ECUADOR

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Abstract

A teacher training project developed for Ecuador is presented as a model for the introduction of Special Education to developing countries. It consists of a pilot program involving a multidisciplinary team approach to the development of an integral system of education for primary schools. One group of twenty university graduates are intensively trained to become teacher trainers. A second group of twenty primary school teachers will be trained to assist children lacking basic readiness skills. The goal of the project is to demonstrate methods by which the high attrition rate in the primary schools of developing nations can be lowered.

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING NATIONS
A PROPOSAL FOR TEACHER TRAINING IN ECUADOR

Maria E. Pynn

Special Education takes on added meaning in the developing countries of the world. Asia, Africa, and Latin America will account for 670 million of the world's children between the ages of 6 and 17 by 1980. Even assuming a rapid decline in fertility rates after 1980, it has been estimated that the number of children in these areas will increase by about 37%, to 913 million by the year 2000. In Latin America this school age population is expected to grow from 10[illegible] million to 138 million in the same period. Children of primary school age will account for the largest part of this increase, growing from 54 to 71 million (Gholl and Zachariah, 1973). Education for these children, who make up over 50% of the population of many countries, must be special to even begin to cope with the effects of this massive population increase.

The first problem that educators must face in any endeavor to provide training for teachers is directly related to this large and growing school- aged segment of the population. In the first place, little money is available for the creation of Special Education programs similar to those found in the developed nations. Many of these countries, including Ecuador, already spend as much as 30% of their government budgets on education (Evans, 1975). While this figure is comparable to state and local expenditures in the United States, the proportion of the total population served by these budgets is much larger, a fact which makes per-pupil expenditures considerably lower.

The result of this situation is that educators find themselves with

50 to 80 pupils to a classroom in primary schools in much of the developing world. Many children arrive at school in Ecuador, for example, without the necessary readiness skills due to environmental factors which impede their development. Crowded classrooms only exacerbate these children's problems. The consequence is that few of the approximately 60% of the school-age population initially registering in grade school actually finish and go on to secondary institutions. Around 15% of the secondary school age population registers to attend classes (Jaguaribe, 1973). The increase in children in Ecuador also affects the training of teachers. In the late sixties, a majority of primary school teachers had not completed the minimum legal requirements for employment (Wilson, 1970).

Given these conditions, the emphasis is necessarily shifted from that of creating a separate agency dealing with Special Education to the more realistic goal of training teachers to keep children who lack basic readiness skills in school. Mainstreaming, a novelty elsewhere, is a fact of life for the majority of the children of the world. The need is clearly in the area of training, but there is an even more important reason for this emphasis. The creation of nationwide programs in Special Education, if found appropriate, is more properly accomplished by the governments of these countries. It is extremely hazardous to lobby directly in behalf of such efforts as a foreign visitor to any country. The feasibility of such an approach, in view of these political considerations and the lack of funds in many cases, is at best questionable.

The preparation of personnel to serve as trainers seems the approach most likely to succeed in fulfilling the immediate needs of many countries. There are many individuals who are working privately to attract professionals

in Special Education for the training of teachers in Ecuador. Dr. Marcia Babra de Gilbert of Guayaquil has worked for years to develop a program in Special Education for Ecuador. Her privately funded institute, FASINARM, has become a showcase for the country, and she welcomes support for her training activities from all over the world. It is likely that other countries are similarly blessed with individuals working to develop Special Education, and the easiest way to get involved in the effort is to work through these people.

Although the following project was developed for Ecuador, the ideas embodied in it can be adapted to many other countries. The key to any training project in developing nations is cost. The problem cannot be solved by importing costly materials which in many cases have little relevance to children whose environment differs from that of the developed countries where these materials originate. Necessary materials can be drawn from the environment that children are familiar with, and need cost no more than the time needed to gather and assemble them.

The primary goal of such a project is to prepare groups of persons to train others to recognize and remedy the problems that children lacking readiness skills face upon entering primary school. The ideal result would be a drop in the rate of attrition in these schools, especially in the first and second grades.

Comprehensive Education for Ecuador:
A Proposal for Teacher Training in Ecuador

The main components of the project are 1) a training program for students and teachers who will assume future roles as teacher-trainers;

2) a pilot project involving a multidisciplinary team approach to develop an integral* system for children's education and welfare; 3) a media campaign to create public awareness of essential readiness skills and the conditions necessary for their development.

The training program consists of the preparation of students for future roles as teacher-trainers. At least twenty university graduates in education or psychology, or graduates of the Escuela Superior de Educacion, all with at least three years of teaching experience, will undertake an intensive twelve month period of training in Special Education. The program will consist of both classroom instruction and practical application. Visiting lecturers will provide the classroom instruction. Four lecturers from the United States are to provide instruction in the fields of mental retardation, early childhood education, learning disabilities, and behavioral disorders.

The specialist in mental retardation will offer a two month seminar emphasizing an introduction to exceptional children, causes of mental retardation, the nature and needs of the mentally retarded, and assessment and teaching strategies for slow learners.

The early childhood specialist will emphasize, in a four month seminar, the child's physical and intellectual development, development of language and cognitive behavior, social and psychological needs of children, readiness skills before formal reading instruction, nutritional needs of growing children, and instructional methods and materials.

The specialist in learning disabilities and behavioral disorders will present, in a three month seminar, the causes of learning problems,

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*An integral system of education 1) involves parents and other members of the community as well as educators, and 2) provides, through the school, non-educational services or referrals.

techniques for teaching learning disabled children, characteristics of behavior disordered children, and counseling of parents and children.

The program director will also lecture. This person will be responsible for coordinating the information presented and for working with the students and teachers to develop appropriate curricula and organize classroom environments.

A second group of trainees will consist of ten first grade and ten second grade teachers. This group will receive the same curriculum as the future trainers, but classroom training will be limited to school vacation periods. The purpose of the training will be to demonstrate that given an appropriate curriculum, children will not drop out in such large numbers, but will on the contrary exhibit gains in performance. The teachers will continue their training after returning to their respective schools. Pretest data will be gathered on the performance, attendance, and attrition of the children in these classes. Posttest measures of achievement will be collected to demonstrate the results of the intervention. The students being prepared as teacher trainers will observe and participate in this part of the project so that they may ascertain for themselves the effectiveness of the training undergone by these teachers.

The second major component of the project, the pilot project involving a multidisciplinary team approach to the development of an integral system of education, will be built around the students and teachers already in training. The objective of this component is to aid these and other teachers in the delivery of services to children attending

primary school. The team will consist of a psychologist, speech pathologist, social worker/nutritionist, bilingual educator (Spanish-Quichua), educational materials specialist, and a physician. The members of this team will perform the following roles.

The psychologist will be responsible for administering psychological and/or intelligence tests and evaluating the results. This person will then submit the results to a team composed of the teacher, parent, social worker, and project staff for discussion. This person will also be asked to counsel the child and family whenever appropriate.

A speech pathologist will be responsible for evaluating children referred by the teacher or parent who are believed to present speech deficiencies. This person will also conduct individualized classes for those children in need of speech therapy. Whenever appropriate, the speech pathologist will counsel teachers and family to offer suggestions to help the child practice appropriate speech patterns or correct articulation in the classroom or at home.

The social worker/nutritionist will be assigned the task of visiting and helping families in the areas of social concerns and nutrition. Whenever possible, the social worker will ask the child's parent to participate in school and classroom activities as aides or resources.

The bilingual educator (Spanish-Quichua) will develop bilingual/bicultural materials to be used by the teachers. This individual will also advise teachers as to the use of these materials. Those children speaking little Spanish will receive extra assistance from this person, insuring that they will learn Spanish as well as Quichua.

The educational materials specialist will be responsible for collecting, supervising, organizing, and evaluating instructional materials. An important element in the development of these materials

is the extent to which they depict environments familiar to the children. To this end, the educational materials specialist will oversee the development of a variety of audio-visual materials depicting animals, plants, cities, towns, factories, haciendas and the like that may be utilized to develop concepts in children.

A physician will conduct a physical examination of each child and provide needed medical services.

In addition to the training and development aspects of the project, two other important elements will be instituted as possible. The participating children will be provided breakfast, and plans for the design and building of low cost classroom environments will be explored with local architects.

The third major component of this project consists of a media campaign. An Ecuadorean public relations and media specialist will be employed in order to keep radio, television, and print media informed throughout the development of the pilot project. The success of the project depends upon cooperation from many sources, and the object of the media campaign is to attract support from government, business, and parent groups. Assistance is also expected from international organizations, which could help in providing various educational programs for radio and television which stress ways to develop readiness skills, community work, self-help skills, hygiene, and nutrition.

Finally, the project will be continuously evaluated in order to empirically assess the effects of the program on the children. The level of performance of the teachers will be investigated, as well as that of the support personnel.

The fundamental goal of the project, again, is to prepare personnel for a future role in training. The potential impact of any such project is closely related to the full utilization of personnel from the project country. Note, for example, that the only foreign participation is limited to specialized training for limited periods. This is a crucial element of the project. Without local participation there is little purpose in training a few teachers in skills which may or may not be relevant to the classroom. The idea is rather to create interest in the possibilities that exist for in-service training. Once this is done, the interested groups will remain involved in accomplishing whatever is possible.

A final note. It is easy to become discouraged once the enormity of the problem is experienced first-hand. This is particularly true when one first confronts the realities of a country in which a majority of the population is under the age of fifteen. But this discouragement is easily set aside once it is realized that the teachers in these countries are of necessity some of the most dedicated people in the world. Meeting them and talking to them about their hopes for the future, one can only be enthused and confident about the potential for improvement.

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